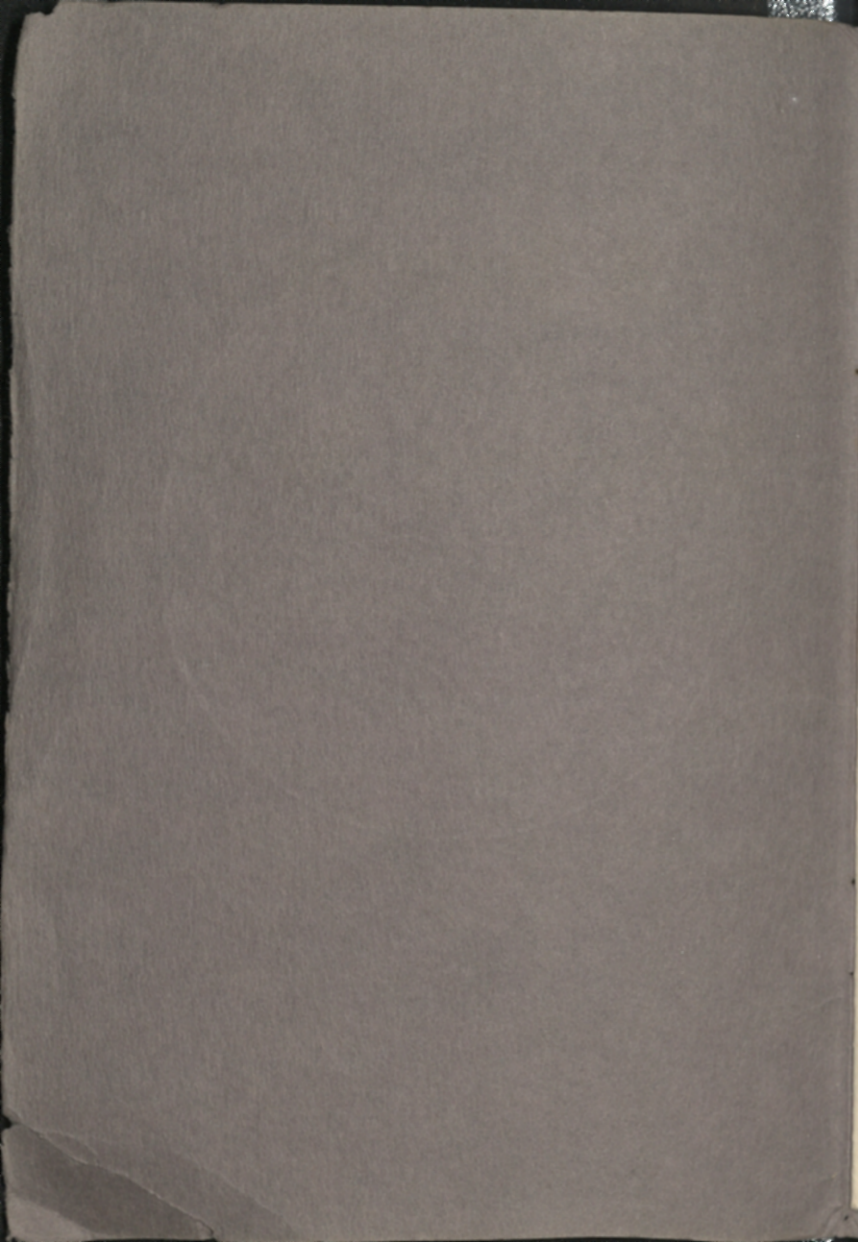


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A Patron of the Weaving Arts

Decorative Fabrics of Distinction

STROHEIM & ROMANN

730 FIFTH AVENUE at 57th STREET
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18th century French silk chasuble, with a floral design richly embroidered in gold and colored silk threads. Jardinières of flowers are embroidered upon the orphreys.



Detail of the orphrey of the Syon cope. The orphrey is of a somewhat later date than the cope itself.

IT is a significant fact that a large percentage of the textiles which we have inherited from past generations are ecclesiastical in character. The most beautiful tapestries have been possessed by churches. The most precious fabrics have been made into dalmatics, copes and altar cloths. The Church, in the past, has been one of the most powerful patrons of the arts. She has been ready and willing to wrap her charitable cloak about those persons and industries engaged in the pursuit of beauty. In so doing she has added to her own glory.

IN the oldest of historical religious documents, the Bible, we read of the richly wrought fabrics which were used as curtains for the tabernacle, and the temple, and for the

ceremonial garments of the priests. "Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubim of cunning work shalt thou make them," says the 26th chapter of Exodus.

THE Babylonians were renowned for their figured tapestries upon which were delineated the mystery of their beliefs. In fact weaving was accepted as the handmaid of religion by all ancient civilizations.

THE Orient first supplied the West with beautiful textiles, and then taught her how to weave them. From Byzantium, the capital of the Roman Empire in the East, came fabrics and patterns which had a remarkable influence on the later development of textile design in Europe. Rich oriental brocades were used by the Western Church for ecclesiastical garments. In the treasury catalogues many are listed under such names as the "lion cope", the "elephant casula", the "peacock garment", etc. It will be seen that the Church did not hesitate to make use of fine fabrics even if the patterns were both foreign and secular.

EARLY Christian art had to organize a whole set of symbols before it could express itself intelligently. Especially interesting are the early Coptic textiles which were woven by native Egyptian Christians. Stiff and archaic as they are, they nevertheless possess a quaintness and picturesqueness which is decidedly attractive.



Early silk pattern from Alexandria, the chief city of Hellenistic Egypt. Alexandria as well as Byzantium supplied the Roman churches with silk fabrics.

DURING the mediaeval period, artistic enterprize was practically a monopoly of the monastic orders. The monasteries were often important ateliers where weavers and embroiderers were engaged in producing the fabrics which were required for the adornment of the churches and the needs of the religious orders.

EMBROIDERY was one of the most important subjects of instruction in mediaeval convents, and the royal and noble ladies who practiced it were taught their craft by cloistered women. Such needlework was ecclesiastical and dedicatory in character.

ENGLISH church embroidery from the 12th to the 14th century is especially beautiful. The Syon cope, a very famous example of *Opus Anglicanum* and said to be one of the "most beautiful among the liturgical vestments of the olden period anywhere to be found in Christendom", was taken to Portugal during the Reformation, and returned to England early in the 19th century by exiled nuns.

WE have already noted the fact that many of the most valuable tapestries have been church property. During the Middle Ages,



*Byzantine silk pattern of the 10th or 11th century,
used for a chasuble.*

tapestries were profusely used as hangings and floor coverings in cathedrals and churches. A certain abbé tells in his memoirs of a 10th century bishop who possessed a very beautiful hanging. It seems that "he had no repose until he had found another hanging of the same design". When the second hanging had been found and purchased, the two were presented to the church.

IT is difficult to ascertain just when tapestry weaving was introduced into France. However, it is known that some monks, in the abbey of Saint-Florent of Samur, made some hangings as early as the year 985.

WHEN artisans felt that they had the skill and courage to carry on their trades independently of the religious orders, they still continued to value their protection, for they collected near the great monasteries and churches, or, as the old records say, "under the monastery".

THE heads of the Roman Catholic Church itself did not disdain to patronize the weaving arts. Long accustomed to the sumptuous fabrics woven for them on Italian looms,



*Detail from an early Renaissance
brocaded border.*

they installed a whole colony of weavers in Avignon during their enforced exile there. When the Pope returned to Italy in 1377, some of these silk weavers are said to have migrated to Lyons, which became later the silk weaving center of France.

BY the beginning of the 13th century, the Arts were no longer entirely in the hands of the monastic orders. Control by the laity became more and more common. Artists and artisans continued to use their talents for the Church, but ecclesiastical decorative art became increasingly secular and unorthodox.

THERE was a semi-pagan character to the arts during the Renaissance. The best artists of the day often designed textiles for the Church. Vasari tells of a set of embroidered vestments which the great painter, Antonio Pollaiuolo, designed for the church of San Giovanni at Florence. And he further adds that the figures were "no less admirably executed with the needle than drawn by Pollaiuolo with the pencil", for it took Paolo da Verona twenty-six years to complete them.

ENGLISH ecclesiastical work came to an end with the Reformation. The destruction of so many past models was a blow from which the arts could not recover. In France, the styles inaugurated by Louis XIV, XV, and XVI were entirely secular in character. Nothing could be more beautiful than the fabrics woven during this period. The lovely

brocades, damasks and velvets, with their floral or conventional designs, were of course used for the churches, but the fact remains that these patterns were not even remotely connected with Church symbolism. The same fabrics might be used for any decorative purpose.

IT might be interesting to add a list of the different vestments which have been so beautifully ornamented in the past. The dalmatic, chasuble, cope, maniple and stole are perhaps the most important from a decorative viewpoint, in that they are customarily made of silk and are elaborately ornamented. The dalmatic, as its name implies, originated in Dalmatia. It is a loose tunic with very wide sleeves. The word chasuble is derived from *casula*, a little house, or hut. Originally, the chasuble was a full, loose, tent-like robe. Later, it became a sleeveless scapular-like cloak. A cope is really, as the word suggests, a cape, and in shape it is almost completely semicircular. It is often made of very rich material with embroidered borders and hood. These gold or otherwise ornamented borders used on vestments are called orphreys from the word *aurum*, meaning gold, and *phrygium*, meaning

